

# The Inherited Wound: Race-Based and Transgenerational Trauma and the Crisis of Second Generation Immigrants in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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## Abstract:

This article examines the impacts of transgenerational trauma on second generation African diaspora in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013), focusing on Dike, the son of Ifemelu's aunt Uju, as a case study. It explores how inherited trauma, combined with experiences of post-migration racism, shapes the psychological struggles of second-generation African diaspora individuals. Relying on Joy DeGruy's Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) and Maria Root's concept of insidious trauma, the article argues that Dike's crisis of belonging reflects an 'invisible wound' unique to diaspora children, produced by the intersection of inherited trauma, parental silence and the racial oppression in the host society. Besides, the article points to the potential for healing through

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recognizing inherited trauma, reconnecting with cultural roots, and confronting structural racism.

**Key words:**Race based trauma- Identity crisis- Diaspora- Transgenerational Trauma- Post trauma- Slave Syndrome- Postmemory- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie- *Americanah*

## Introduction

This article offers a reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) through the critical lenses of trauma theory, particularly the manifestations of race-based and transgenerational trauma. The contemporary Nigerian author Adichie is broadly celebrated for examining race, gender, class, and migration. Her literary works reflect her awareness of the cultural and psychological tensions influenced by her exposure to both Nigerian and American cultures which make her feel 'an outsider in both places' (Hall, 2020, p. 272). She explains that 'because black people have been so dehuman-ized, people have inherited that thinking, and so it's almost automatic to try and find ways to justify the violence done against them' (Hall, 2020, p. 270). Adichie's awareness is central to the exploration of identity formation and belonging among Black immigrants across generations.

*Americanah* deals with immigrants' experiences, focusing particularly on Black people who are confronted by a racial hierarchy that was previously unfamiliar to them. The novel mainly focuses on the protagonist Ifemelu who becomes more conscious of race in the United States. While much of the story revolves around first generation immigrants, the secondary plot of Dike, Ifemelu's nephew, which is mostly analysed as a moment of narrative crisis, is in fact a pivotal event in the story. His suicide attempt reveals the enduring psychological consequences of

intergenerational racial trauma, highlighting second-generation immigrants' vulnerability to internalized devaluation and crisis of belonging.

*Americanah* has been studied from different perspectives including postcolonial, feminist, race studies, structural, and psychological ones. S. Gayathri examines *Americanah* through the lens of 'cultural trauma' as theorized by Jeffrey Alexander and Kai Erikson. Gayathri states that 'Though collective trauma as a theory finds individual trauma secondary as it deeply concentrates on the psychic scar that affects the community, it can be found ... that individual trauma is definitely a major aspect that defines the intensity of cultural trauma at an individual basis' (2018, p. 100). Gayathri's article examines Dike's suicide attempt as a symptom of collective cultural trauma caused by migration and systemic alienation.

In their article, Asika and Osigwe explain that *Americanah* is about racism, discrimination and humiliation that permeate and undermine all aspects of immigrants' lives. They argue that most characters are pushed to leave their countries due to Africa's instability, poverty, and corruption. Yet, after migration, they find themselves physically, environmentally and psychologically strained as they are dehumanized, traumatized and forced to discard their authentic selves to adopt fake identities to survive. Relying on the Reader Response Theory, the two authors assert that for Adichie, America is 'a racist environment arranged to swallow a black immigrant in the cesspool of things he cannot control' (2022, p. 115). The article interprets Ifemelu's homecoming as Adichie's message to other immigrants to return to where they truly belong, to rebuild their own country.

The two studies as well as many others approach *Americanah* from cultural or diasporic perspectives, interpreting psychological and cultural trauma primarily as the outcome of migration and exile where racism and

discrimination are prevalent. This article instead, adopts a different analytical framework by asserting that racial trauma is not merely a personal or collective experience. Instead, it is a historically inherited legacy rooted in slavery and perpetuated through repeated exposure to daily subtle and insidious daily events. Thus, the trauma endured by the characters is transgenerational and cumulative, emerging from enduring historical and social legacies rather than isolated or personal experiences.

The article focuses particularly on Dike, a representative of second generation immigrants, as a case study for Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as framed by Joy DeGruy. The choice to examine this character is motivated by the fact that he is a crucial, yet underexplored figure. *Americanah* traces Dike's life from a happy and innocent childhood to a more complicated adolescence during which he experiences an identity crisis. Adichie uses Dike to demonstrate the profound consequences of immigrants' life, particularly sacrifices made by parents to secure a better future, which inadvertently place significant psychological pressures on their children.

DeGruy defines Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as the 'condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today.' (2017, p.105). She argues that slavery is a brutal experience that affected the 'slave's body, mind and spirit' leading enslaved people to adapt certain attitudes and strategies 'to simply survive' those harsh conditions. It is those adaptations and behaviours that are transmitted and continue to manifest across generations as coping mechanisms. She identifies three categories of behaviour that are Vacant Esteem, Ever Present Anger, and Racist Socialization.

Vacant esteem is a 'state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society' (2017, p.108). It results from the interaction of three key factors which are society, community and family. Ever present anger is an inevitable consequence of daily degradation, discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups in society. DeGruy says 'even when we're feeling good, an ever-present anger resides just below our surface: anger at the violence, degradation, and humiliation visited upon us, our ancestors, and our children; anger at being relegated to the margins of the society in which we live' (2017, p.115). It is also triggered by the long history of racial oppression characterized by social and cultural marginalization as well as not having 'equal' opportunities'. The last behaviour which is Racist Socialization describes Black's internalization of the dominant society's racist attitudes, values and beliefs. DeGruy explains that 'the effects of almost four centuries of legalized abuse, programmed enslavement, and institutionalized oppression can be seen today' (2017, p.118).

Clinical psychologist Maria Primitiva Paz Root extends the definition of trauma which previously encompasses catastrophic events to include experiences related to race, class and gender. She identifies three types of traumas that are direct, indirect and insidious. The latter refers to the emotional damage that is caused by constant devaluation, marginalization and systemic discrimination. It is related to 'the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power, for example, gender, color... As a result, it is often present throughout a lifetime' (1992, 240). Root explains that insidious trauma includes events that seem 'normative' but profoundly

traumatising. It may sometimes affect minority groups at an early age, before understanding its devastating psychological impacts, as ‘it does not typically include physical violence, yet leaves a distinct threat to psychological safety, security, or survival’ (1992, p. 241).

DeGruy’s Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is relevant to explain the enduring effects of historical and transgenerational trauma on several characters including Dike. It shows how the unresolved trauma of slavery can impact even those who have not directly experienced it. This legacy manifests as vacant esteem, ever present anger and racist socialization that are responses observed in black individuals, particularly those living in societies marked by racism and discrimination. Alongside DeGruy’s framework, Root’s concept of insidious trauma emphasizes that seemingly ‘normative’ experiences can be psychologically traumatising. Taken together, these frameworks reveal Dike’s identity crisis and suicide attempt are the outcome of inherited historical trauma, intensified by persistent daily pressures of racial marginalization.

### **1- Dike’s mother as the Trauma Bearer**

Uju’s life demonstrates that trauma is not only caused by sudden overwhelming events. It is rather shaped by social as well as structural conditions. Despite moving to Lagos to escape poverty and the limitations of rural life and graduating as a doctor, she is still faced by the economic instability of her country. Uju has internalized widespread beliefs that in Nigeria, her degree does not guarantee economic security. Her decision to ‘seduce’ a ‘big man’ is not a choice but a survival strategy she adopts in a ‘corrupt’ society. She becomes involved with a General in a secret relation that profoundly transforms her life. Despite her outwardly luxurious life, Uju becomes financially dependent on him and had to ask for everything she

needs including money. She lacks agency and becomes submissive, favouring financial stability over freedom. Such experiences reveal insidious trauma as Uju is stripped of her agency and autonomy and forced into structural dependency on a patriarchal system.

Uju's lifestyle reflects the weight of insidious trauma shaped by women's daily endurance of normalized patriarchy, sexism and oppression. It is characterized by chronic and invisible psychological scars. Choosing the General despite his age and unappealing appearance is a pragmatic calculation shaped by systemic constraints. The insidious trauma Uju undergoes is not produced by a single shocking or overwhelming event. It is rather the outcome of patriarchal structures that socialize women to normalize dependence and tolerate living with limited authority and power imbalance.

Uju's behaviour also reflects transgenerational transmission of trauma. She is the product of a society in which women have for a long time endured male dominance, financial hardships and political instability. These conditions rooted in the British colonial role that disturbed traditional social systems and deepened the existing social disparities. The Biafran war and the corruption it left behind further worsened the conditions as it reinforced patriarchy and women's economic dependency. Consequently, to secure social and economic stability, women adapted survival strategies that were later normalized through socialization and transmitted to subsequent generations.

Uju unexpectedly became pregnant and wants to keep it despite the pressure on her. Her reaction is the outcome of a prior abortion that has deeply traumatized her. The fact that she had to undergo abortion reveals women's limited options, power and agency within a patriarchal and

traditional society. As for the General, he urges Uju to ‘deliver abroad’ and register the baby under her last name to hide his secret affair with her since he is already a married man. Such circumstances reveal an insidious trauma, amplified by patriarchal constraints.

Due to Nigeria’s postcolonial instability and political upheavals, the General dies in a military plane crash. As a result, Uju and her young son are left with no financial security or inheritance rights owing to her status as a secret mistress. Things worsened when the General’s relatives start humiliating and threatening her saying “Uju! Pack your things and get out now... Common harlot! God forbid that you will touch our brother’s property! Prostitute! You will never live in peace in this Lagos!” (Adichie, 2014, p. 105). The scene shows how women are subjected to social stigmatization when they do not comply with traditional gender roles. Under these circumstances, Uju is compelled to migrate with her two-years-old son to America.

In the United States, Uju encounters new hardships that complicate her search for stability and security including economic struggle, social marginalization, and psychological pressure. Despite being a trained doctor in Nigeria, she is ‘not yet qualified to practice medicine in America’ (Adichie, 2014, p. 121) even after four years and must pass additional examinations in order to obtain the credentials required. She is compelled to take low-paying jobs to survive with her son. Uju’s life illustrates the challenges and sacrifices many immigrants encounter in foreign countries. Their professional identities are often undermined because their academic degrees and professional qualifications are frequently unrecognized or fail to satisfy the accreditation standards of the host country.

Initially, Uju lives in Brooklyn, but due to its largely Black population, she decides to relocate and register her son in a private school. She does not want Dike to be brought up among children whom she considers 'wild' and lacking proper 'home training' reflecting an internalized racism. Uju's attitude also reflects DeGruy's concept of racist socialization which argues that 'through the centuries of slavery and the decades of institutionalized oppression that followed, many African Americans have, in essence, been socialized to be something akin to white racists' (2017, p. 116). Paradoxically, Uju and Dike face the same stereotyping when they moved to a predominantly white neighbourhood. Uju encounters racism and discrimination in its most overt forms as she is treated as an unprofessional doctor and patients refuse to be examined by her only because she is Black. Her accent is also criticized as being unfamiliar and muddled.

Due to the difficulties in her life, Uju seeks a man she can rely on. She dates Bartholomew, whom Ifemelu disapproves of. Uju tells her 'I'm not getting any younger ... We are not in Nigeria ... Please just pray that it will work' (Adichie, 2014, pp. 144–145). Her behavior exemplifies vacant esteem, which DeGruy defines as 'the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by similar pronouncements of inferiority from the personal sphere and larger society' (2017, pp. 107- 108). While living with him, Uju assumes the role of a submissive wife, performing roles shaped by internalized gender expectations. However, later on Uju expresses frustration with Bartholomew's behaviour. He is not only indifferent to them, but also irresponsible and consistently requests money from her. Dike, in turn, becomes disobedient, ignoring his mother's instructions.

Uju's psychological state characterized by 'impatience' and 'prickliness' illustrates the cumulative impact of her life experiences. Ifemelu

recognizes that America ‘had subdued’ her aunt, transforming her into a woman whose primary concern is merely supporting herself and her son. She is deeply disappointed by her new life in the United States and criticizes the demanding and often misleading examinations. Her character embodies Joy DeGruy’s concepts of ‘ever-present anger’ and chronic anxiety which is a ‘reaction to our hopes and dreams being continuously undermined by the institutions which govern us and the racism that permeates American society’ (2017, p. 115). DeGruy emphasizes that Black individuals often experience anger as a result of the daily ‘violence’, ‘humiliation’, and ‘degradation’ they endure as well as their awareness of being marginalized, misrepresented, and trivialized.

## **2- The impact of Uju’s Unresolved Trauma on the Formation of Dike’s Fragmented Identity**

Uju undergoes traumatic experiences that shape her identity and sense of security. The death of the General is a turning point in her life as she is compelled to leave Nigeria and move to the United States. As a single mother, she encounters socioeconomic hardships, intensified by racial prejudice. Uju’s anxiety has influenced her parenting style, making her overprotective of her son. In spite of Dike’s requests to know about his father and background, she maintains silence, leaving his questions unanswered. Uju frequently relocates in search of a suitable environment, choosing places where less Black people live, a fact that reflects DeGruy’s concept of racist socialization.

Uju’s relation with Bartholomew, meant to provide stability and family for Dike, results in strained relation with her son who experiences emotional neglect. He silently observes their growing closeness, feeling increasingly excluded especially that his mother imposes strict rules and high

expectations, demanding compliance and good behaviour. She pressures him to assimilate into the white society and restricts his connection to the Nigerian culture. Furthermore, Uju repeatedly warns Dike that misbehaviour could result in being sent back to Nigeria. These pressures contribute to his cultural confusion and fractured identity. This is shown when he tells Ifemelu, 'I don't think I like Nigeria' (Adichie, 2014, p. 139), a declaration that reveals emotional and cultural disconnection. Uju even prevents Ifemelu from speaking Igbo with him, reflecting Fanon's observation that some families entirely prohibit their children from using their mother tongue (1986, p. 20). In this context, DeGruy notes that 'some of the extreme ways we have worked to make our children submissive and docile provide examples of established parenting practices that can contribute to vacant esteem (2017, p. 109).

As a young boy, Ifemelu describes Dike as 'a first grader with a seamless American accent and a hyper happiness about him' (Adichie, 2014, p. 129). This suggests that Dike has successfully assimilated into white culture especially that he mostly mixes with white and upper-class peers and dates a blond girl. This may reflect Uju's impact in shaping his interactions, encouraging him to socializes mainly with whites. This supports DeGruy's view that Black individuals often internalize feelings of inferiority, distancing themselves from their own racial group as they believe that 'white and all things associated with whiteness are superior; and that black and all things associated with blackness are inferior' (2017, p. 116).

Dike spends much of his time with white peers who 'enjoy his jokes, and looked to him for agreement, and in a delicate, unspoken way, they let him make their collective decisions' (Adichie, 2014, p. 412). This suggests a superficial inclusion, as their awareness of his Blackness results in a careful

and performative interaction. Among them, Dike changes his behaviour and ‘took on a swagger in his voice and in his gait, his shoulders squared, as though in a high-gear performance, and sprinkled his speech with ‘ain’t’ and ‘y’all’ (Adichie, 2014, p. 412) which is a deliberate performance of Black masculinity. His exaggerated ‘swagger’ can be understood through DeGruy’s observation that Black individuals often ‘mold themselves to accommodate white prejudices and endeavor to adopt their standards’ (2017, p. 116). Dike attempts to adjust his behavior in ways that meet their expectations by adopting traits stereotypically associated with Black identity.

### 3- Racial Awakening and the Crisis of belonging

Dike’s upbringing is deeply shaped by his mother’s financial struggles and concerns about racial discrimination. Her accounts about the discrimination she daily undergoes indirectly exposes him to the realities of racial prejudice. DeGruy argues that ‘when parents believe themselves to have little or no value, it reflects itself in behaviors that can instill a similar belief in their children’ (2017, p. 109). Despite Dike’s efforts to assimilate, being surrounded mostly by white friends marks an early exposure to racial ideas about skin color and identity. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon notes that ‘a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world’ (1986, p. 143), emphasizing how racialized surroundings can destabilize a child’s sense of identity.

Dike’s racial consciousness emerges in high school. Upon his return, from a summer camp, Ifemelu notices ‘guardedness on his face, something close to sadness’ (Adichie, 2014, p.226). He tells Ifemelu how his friends laughed at him when their group leader gave sunscreen to all the white children except him, explaining that he does not need it. Although Ifemelu

later buys him sunscreen, he does not use it, revealing that he is more concerned with equal treatment than the product itself. Dike feels marginalized by the leader's differentiation between him and other boys his age, reflecting how racial prejudice can be communicated subtly. It is observed that 'African American children are often treated with disdain upon entering an elementary, middle, or high school' (DeGruy, 2017, p. 23), which is evident in Dike's experience.

When Ifemelu tries to soothe Dike, he says "It's okay," ... It was kind of funny' (Adichie, 2014, p. 226). Yet, he tells her 'I just want to be regular' (Adichie, 2014, p. 227), an answer that reveals an unspoken wound. The group leader's discrimination exemplifies aversive racism which aims to 'maintain distance from the undesirable group members...racial discrimination helps dominant racial group members engage in racism without overtly appearing to do so; consequently, it is difficult to detect because other feasible reasons can be used to explain people's behavior' (Carter et al., 2005, p. 471). The group leader implicitly excludes Dike, masking her intentions by claiming that she is unaware that Black people require sunscreen. Such behaviors according to Root though seemingly normative and non-violent, can have traumatic effects especially on young children since they are unable to comprehend the discrimination they experience.

Dike's school repeatedly reports misconduct and behavioural issues. For instance, once, they called Uju to inform her that Dike is suspected of hacking the school's network, which reflects enduring racial stereotypes that represent Black individuals as inherently dangerous. Uju is furious because she knows her son lacks the technical skills to do it. She is convinced that 'just because he looks different, when he does what other little boys do, it

becomes aggression’ (Adichie, 2014, p.212). Her anger intensifies when a teacher suggests placing Dike in special education, a stigmatizing label that reflects the systemic overrepresentation of Black children. In light of this, DeGruy claims that Black individuals have historically been perceived as ‘intimidating, aggressive, threatening, and intense’ (2017, p. 143). Dike tells them they have ‘to blame the black kid first’ (Adichie, 2014, p. 433).

Though Uju is assured that Dike is treated like other students, she contests saying ‘my son sticks out, so how can you tell me that you don’t see any difference?’ (Adichie, 2014, p. 212). George Lipsitz, a scholar in race and cultural studies argues that ‘expecting social institutions to redress racial injuries without referring to race is like having to ask directions to a destination you are not allowed to name’ (2019, p. 24). This means claiming colorblindness does not eliminate racism. Uju’s claim that Dike’s blackness is visible reflects an internalized awareness of being perceived as threatening due to racial difference.

Dike also recounts other incidents, such as his friends teasingly asking whether he has brought ‘weed’ and a white pastor who addresses white children formally in church but switches to casual slang when speaking with him. Though these interactions may appear innocuous, they reinforce racial stereotypes that categorize Black people as dangerous, uneducated, and socially inferior. Dike responds with humour and mockery, but his attempt to mask discomfort suggests a deeper emotional impact. This is especially apparent when he says he feels he has a ‘large broccoli’, not ears. These experiences exemplify Maria Root’s concept of insidious trauma as they extend beyond isolated microaggressions and are instead the daily subtle, cumulative acts of racialized discrimination endured under a mask of normalcy.

Ifemelu notices that behind Dike's laughter lies sadness that obscures his thoughts and emotions. He gradually changes from a cheerful and bright kid, to someone who views 'his mother, and the world, with a weariness too heavy for a child' (Adichie, 2014, p. 211). After reading a school assignment on identity written by Dike, Uju realizes that her son 'does not know what he is' and feels 'conflicted' about his 'difficult' name (Adichie, 2014, p. 269). This demonstrates how exposure to racism leads to conflicts regarding identity and belonging. In this context, DeGruy asserts that 'Africans were taught they were inferior physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, thus rendering them completely ineffectual in their own eyes and in the eyes of the society around them' (2017, p. 118).

Uju observes that in the U.S., children's misbehaviour or criminal acts are attributed either to psychological disorders or to their parents, particularly mothers. This reflects Laura S. Brown's argument that individuals or families are blamed rather than the 'social structures that perpetuate ... victimization' (1995, p. 106). Brown explains that 'genuine' trauma is defined as life threatening events including death or serious injuries where victims are 'unwilling'. This excludes daily subtle harms (insidious trauma) which fall outside this definition, perpetuating 'the myth of the willing victim'. The latter is a social construct that sustains discrimination between 'women and men, between people of color and white people, between poor people and those with wealth' (1995, pp. 105- 106

Dike's conflicted identity is the result of the cumulative emotional harm of racial discrimination. His physical difference makes him a target of ridicule and exposes him to racial stereotyping by peers, teachers and school authorities. Such experiences undermine his self-esteem and sense of belonging, foster isolation, and contribute to the internalization of negative

racial stereotypes. Despite his attempts to appear cheerful, Ifemelu senses his laughter to be a 'shield, and underneath, there might have been a growing pea plant of trauma' (Adichie, 2014, p.471). This unspoken pain ultimately culminates in a suicide attempt, expressing his inability to cope with a world that marginalizes him because of his racial difference.

Ifemelu attributes Dike's depression in part to Uju's parenting which is the result of an 'exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity' (Adichie, 2014). This insecurity manifests in Uju's vacant esteem and hypervigilance of racial differences, reflecting a survival strategy through which she aims to prepare Ifemelu and Dike for a racially structured society. She warns Ifemelu that all Blacks 'look alike to white people' (Adichie, 2014, p. 148) and advises her to comply and assimilate if she wants to succeed saying 'you are in a country that is not your own' (Adichie, 2014). She adopts the same attitude towards Dike. For instance, when his school reports that he talks in class, she urges him 'to tone it down, because his own will always be seen as different' (Adichie, 2014, p. 267) even though Dike explains that he speaks only after completing his work, just as his classmates do.

However, the paradox in Uju's parenting lies in warning Dike that he will always be seen as different from his white peers while denying his identification with Blackness. When Dike refers to himself as part of the 'black folk', she corrects him saying 'you are not black' (Adichie, 2014, p.470). Thus, in attempting to ensure success through assimilation, Uju leaves Dike rootless, without a stable cultural or racial identity. He is caught between a Nigerian community with which he cannot fully identify and an American society that continues to marginalize him. This is further reinforced by his limited exposure to Igbo language, which Ifemelu fears 'would become for him the language of strife' (Adichie, 2014, p.211), since

Uju mainly uses it to reprimand and threaten to send him to Nigeria if he misbehaves.

It is noted that ‘a mother’s unresolved trauma may interfere with her ability to ... respond to her infant, thus affecting the development of attachment in her own child ... contributing to the intergenerational transmission of trauma’ (Iyengar et al, 2014, p. 1). In this respect, Dike’s development is shaped by his mother’s experiences of instability and patriarchal dependence in Nigeria as well as her subsequent encounters with racism and discrimination in America. Although Dike has no direct memory of his mother’s past or her daily experiences of professional and racial injustices, he is profoundly affected by her unspoken emotional stress and over-protectiveness regarding issues of identity, race and belonging. In Marianne Hirsch’s terms, Dike internalizes his mother’s fear, anxiety, and trauma through postmemory, as he is ‘dominated by narratives that preceded his birth’ (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5).

#### **4- Return to Nigeria and Reconnection to Roots**

Ifemelu plays a pivotal role in Dike’s emotional recovery. DeGruy explains that ‘who or what we perceive ourselves to be is influenced first by those in our immediate environment ... parents, families, and friends play a vital role in helping us form our image of ourselves. (2017, p. 121). Ifemelu acts as a cousin and guide, offering emotional support for Dike to confront the racial realities he faces in America. Unlike Uju, she encourages him to accept and reconnect to his African heritage. After her return to Nigeria, she invites Dike to visit his homeland, which is an opportunity to reduce his identity confusion, rebuild his self esteem and provide a sense of belonging. This aligns with DeGruy’s assertion that ‘we need to truly understand and accept who we are as a people. It is through knowing who and what we are

that we can identify our strengths and build upon them.’ (2017, p. 157). Upon arriving, Dike is astonished by the number of Black people exclaiming ‘Oh my God, Coz, I’ve never seen so many black people in the same place!’ (Adichie, 2014, p.518).

DeGruy emphasizes that ‘any level of healing first requires an accurate assessment of the damage (2017, p. 158). Recognizing what triggers Dike’s identity crisis, Ifemelu takes him to Dolphin Estate to visit the house he shared with his parents and tells him about his loving father. This narrative serves a therapeutic purpose by providing tangible memories, reducing feelings of being lost and rootless and breaking his mother’s silence about an unspeakable past. In America, within the predominantly white environment chosen by Uju, Dike feels isolated and physically different especially that he is the only black child in his school, which intensifies his internalized race-based trauma. Thus, seeing so many Black people in Nigeria is a profoundly transformative experience as he realises for the first time that he is not a minority.

The election of Barack Obama as a president is also a crucial moment in his life. It challenges his previously internalized belief that blackness equals inferiority. His joyful remark that the president is black ‘like’ him indicates that he finally recognizes that Black people are capable of leadership. This provides him with psychological relief as his black identity is validated by the achievement of a black president.

## **Conclusion**

The article demonstrates that Dike’ identity is shaped by transgenerational trauma and exposure to a racialized social environment as well. His experiences show that migration affects not only first generation immigrants but also their descendents who inherit intergenerational trauma

through exposure to their parents' lived experiences, parenting styles and the lasting effects of racism and discrimination. Dike's crisis of identity and belonging that culminates in a suicide attempt illustrates how unresolved trauma can be transmitted across generations. Uju attempts to shield Dike from racial prejudice and discrimination but he absorbs her anxieties and unresolved trauma. Her overprotection leaves him rootless, unprepared to face American racism and simultaneously disconnected from his cultural origin. Being a second generation diaspora child, Dike embodies what can be characterized as the 'silent wound' of inherited trauma.

Frantz Fanon's observation that Blackness is a 'uniform' identity imposed by white society emphasizes the weight of racialization carried by Dike. His humanity, like that of many Black individuals, is overshadowed by the social significance imposed on his colour and race. Dike bears the psychological weight of racialization, as he is marginalized and confined to a minority position. Through portraying his vulnerability and gradual path towards healing, the article suggests the possibility of healing through acknowledging transgenerational trauma, reclaiming cultural ties and confronting systemic racial oppression.

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